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Media Contact:

Sasha Bianchi, District Director
Vermont Department of Health
802-476-0161

Celebrate National Public Health Week April 1-7
Public Health is ROI: Save Money. Save Lives.

2013 County Health Rankings Detail Health Disparities in the Healthiest State

BARRE – Vermont has been ranked #1 healthiest in *America's Health Rankings* for many years in a row. But Vermonters are not equally healthy, as reported in the latest *County Health Rankings* by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Now available at www.countyhealthrankings.org, the 2013 report ranks Chittenden County as the healthiest in the state, and Essex and Orleans Counties as least healthy. The rankings are based on health outcomes – length of life and quality of life – and health factors such as smoking, alcohol use, physical activity, access to quality health care, income, education, employment and the built environment.

“Health is strongly influenced by the choices we have available to us,” said Sasha Bianchi, director for the Barre district office of the Health Department. “The reality is that many low income Vermonters do not have the same opportunities to make healthy choices.”

Barre City, which has a higher than average proportion of individuals living below the poverty line, has demonstrated a commitment to overcoming these disparities. The new city plan focuses on health and well-being. Proposed initiatives include increasing access to healthy food, making the city more pedestrian and bike friendly and rehabilitating substandard housing. The plan is still open for comment, with plans for a public hearing this summer.

Many adults in the area also do not have dental insurance, which often means that individuals delay care and may need to be seen in the emergency room. People's Health and Wellness Clinic, in collaboration with community partners, is designing a referral system that will allow its patients to receive free dental care.

“Public health is about making it easier for everyone to live well,” said Bianchi. “It is a large undertaking that requires community wide collaboration.”

Among the findings in the 2013 *County Health Rankings*:

- 10% of adults in Washington County report poor or fair health, compared to 8% of adults in Chittenden County.
- 17% of adults in Washington County smoke, compared to 12% in Chittenden County.
- 18% of adults in Washington County report they are physically inactive, compared to 15% in Chittenden County.
- 2% report limited access to healthy foods in Washington County, compared to 4% in Chittenden County.

The *County Health Rankings* rank the overall health of nearly every county in all 50 states. Nationally, the data revealed that unhealthy counties have more than twice the rate of premature deaths than healthy ones and childhood poverty rates are twice as high in unhealthy counties. The *Rankings* allow counties to see how they compare to other counties within the state based on a range of factors that influence health.

Celebrate Health during National Public Health Week

During National Public Health Week April 1-7, the Vermont Department of Health will highlight the daily work of public health, and will launch *Healthy Vermonters 2020* – the state health assessment that documents the health status of Vermonters at the start of the decade, and sets the goals that will guide the work of public health through 2020.

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